IN THE CLAIMS:

1) (Original) A method of producing filter-tipped cigarettes, the method comprising the steps of feeding an orderly succession of first tobacco articles (4), spaced with a first pitch (P1) and each defined by a double cigarette portion, to a first portion (S1) of a path (B) extending along a filter assembly machine (5); feeding said first articles (4) along said first portion (S1) and through a first cutting station (12) to cut said first articles (4) transversely into respective pairs of portions (13, 14), and then through spacing means (18) for axially spacing the portions (13, 14) in each said pair; feeding said pairs of spaced portions (13, 14) along a second portion (S2) of said path (B); interposing, as they travel along said second portion (S2), a double filter (21) between the portions (13, 14) in each said pair, to form a succession of second articles (29), each defined by the relative said pair of portions (13, 14) and by the relative interposed said double filter (21); applying by rolling, along said second portion (S2), a respective strip (33) to each second article (29) to connect the relative said pair of portions (13, 14) and the relative said double filter (21) and form a third article (40) defined by a double cigarette; feeding said third articles (40) along a third portion (S3) of said path (B) and through a second cutting station (45) to obtain, from each said third article (40), two fourth articles (46) oppositely oriented and each defined by a filter-tipped cigarette; and feeding said fourth articles (46) along a fourth portion (S4) of said path (B) and through a turnover unit (50) to

obtain a succession of equioriented said fourth articles (46); and being characterized by comprising the further step of subjecting said first articles (4), as they travel along said first portion (S1) or as they are transferred from said first portion (S1) to said second portion (S2), to a pitch reduction to assume a second pitch (P2) shorter than said first pitch (P1) and of a length approximately equal to but no less than the length of the relative said strip (33).

2) (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said first pitch is about 37.7 mm, and said second pitch (P2) ranges between 30 and 32 mm.

3) (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 2, characterized in that said second pitch (P2) is about 31 mm long.

4) (Currently amended) A method as claimed in ~~one of the~~ Claim 1 ~~to 3~~, wherein said pitch reduction is made at the end of said first portion (S1) as said first articles (4) are transferred from said first portion (S1) to said second portion (S2).

5) (Currently amended) A method as claimed in ~~one of the~~ Claim 1 ~~to 3~~, wherein said pitch reduction is made along the first portion (S1).

6) (Currently amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of the foregoing Claims~~ Claim 1, and comprising the further step of subjecting said third articles (40), as they travel along said second portion

(S2), to a further pitch reduction to assume a third pitch (P3) shorter than said second pitch (P2).

7) (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 6, wherein said further pitch reduction is made as said third articles (40) are transferred from said second portion (S2) to said third portion (S3).

8) (Currently amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of Claims~~ Claim 1 ~~to 7~~, and comprising the further step of subjecting said fourth articles (46), as they travel along said fourth portion (S4), to yet a further pitch reduction to assume a fourth pitch (P4) shorter than said third pitch (P3).

9) (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 8, wherein said yet a further pitch reduction is made as said fourth articles (46) travel through said turnover unit (50).

10) (Original) A method of producing filter-tipped cigarettes, the method comprising the steps of feeding an orderly succession of first tobacco articles (4), spaced with a first pitch (P1) and each defined by a double cigarette portion, to a first portion (S1) of a path (B) extending along a filter assembly machine (5); feeding said first articles (4) along said first portion (S1) and through a first cutting station (12) to cut said first articles (4) transversely into respective pairs of portions (13, 14), and then through spacing means (18) for axially spacing the portions (13, 14) in each said pair; feeding said pairs of spaced portions (13, 14) along a

second portion (S2) of said path (B); interposing, as they travel along said second portion (S2), a double filter (21) between the portions (13, 14) in each said pair, to form a succession of second articles (29), each defined by the relative said pair of portions (13, 14) and by the relative interposed said double filter (21); applying by rolling, along said second portion (S2), a respective strip (33) to each second article (29) to connect the relative said pair of portions (13, 14) and the relative said double filter (21) and form a third article (40) defined by a double cigarette; feeding said third articles (40) along a third portion (S3) of said path (B) and through a second cutting station (45) to obtain, from each said third article (40), two fourth articles (46) oppositely oriented and each defined by a filter-tipped cigarette; and feeding said fourth articles (46) along a fourth portion (S4) of said path (B) and through a turnover unit (50) to obtain a succession of equioriented said fourth articles (46); and being characterized by comprising the further steps of subjecting said first articles (4), as they travel along said first portion (S1) or as they are transferred from said first portion (S1) to said second portion (S2), to a pitch reduction to assume a second pitch (P2) shorter than said first pitch (P1) and of a length approximately equal to but no less than the length of the relative said strip (33); subjecting said third articles (40), as they travel along said second portion (S2), to a second pitch reduction to assume a third pitch (P3) shorter than said second pitch (P2); and subjecting said fourth articles (46), as they travel along said fourth portion

(S4), to a third pitch reduction to assume a fourth pitch (P4) shorter than said third pitch (P3).